

CITY AND COUNTY



OF SAN FRANCISCO

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TO: Supervisor Katz

SEP 10 1997

FROM: Budget Analyst

SUBJECT: Burial Space for San Franciscans

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

This report is prepared in response to your request concerning burial space for San Franciscans as we approach the millennium. According to Mr. Paul Scannell, the staffperson for the San Francisco/San Mateo Counties Task Force, whose purpose is to improve communication between the two jurisdictions, this issue regarding the burial needs for San Franciscans has not been discussed by the Task Force.

Historical Background

In the 1920s, in response to the lack of land for housing and other uses, San Francisco prohibited cremations or cemeteries within the City (with the exception of the Presidio). Currently, the City's Health Code Sections 195 and 200 state that it is unlawful to cremate or bury a body within the boundaries of San Francisco, exclusive of those areas under the jurisdiction of the United States government. After the prohibition of cremations and cemeteries was adopted, the remains of San Francisco's cemeteries were reinterred to the then newly formed City of Colma, which was specifically established for that purpose.

Current Arrangements

Ms. Jean Duggan of the Public Health Department reports that the death count in San Francisco has hovered around 8,000 persons per year for the past three years. According to Ms. Duggan, although she cannot provide a precise number, an overwhelming majority of San Franciscans are buried or interred in Colma.

The City of Colma is approximately two square miles with 75 percent of this land designated for cemetery or cemetery-related purposes. Sixteen privately-owned cemeteries provide cremation and burial services in the City of Colma. The Budget Analyst contacted the following four cemeteries to determine the amount of available space in the City of Colma: (1) Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery, (2) Cypress Lawn Memorial Park, (3) Olivet Memorial Park and (4) Woodlawn Memorial Park. These four cemeteries together represent approximately 62 percent of the total area designated for cemetery or cemetery-related uses in the City of Colma.

Determining Space Needs

In assessing the amount of land available for future burial needs for San Franciscans, several factors must be taken into consideration: (1) the trend toward cremations; (2) the more efficient use of grounds of existing cemeteries; and (3) the ability of cemeteries in Colma to acquire additional land. Since the early 1980s, the trend has been toward an increasing number of cremations. According to a 1993 study conducted by the California Funeral Directors Association, in 1981, 25 percent of cases were cremated whereas in 1993 the number of cremations had increased to 43 percent. Cremated remains at the cemetery are stored in mausoleums, in which urns may be buried in columns, requiring very little space. According to Mr. Robert Lefebvre of Olivet Memorial Park, the cremated remains of eight persons can be stored in the amount of space needed for a full-casket burial of one person. In addition, the remains from many cremations do not remain at the cemetery performing the cremation but rather are taken to residences or the remains are scattered. Therefore, cremations impose no additional space requirements for the cemetery. As cremation requires far less space, the increased demand for cremations will increase the capacity limitations of the cemeteries.

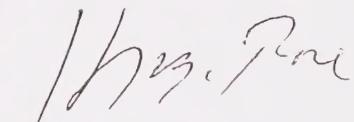
Second, all the cemeteries can use their current grounds more efficiently. This could be done by converting decorative floral areas into burial areas. Mausoleums could also be built for more land-efficient storage of crypts.

Thirdly, although there have been some recent development pressures in the City of Colma, many of the cemeteries in Colma have the option of purchasing additional land for cemetery use. For example, a golf course in Colma was reduced from an 18-hole course to a 9-hole course in order to make additional land available for cemetery space. At some later date, this 9-hole golf course could again be converted for such use. In addition, Cypress Lawn Memorial Park is in the process of adding 15 acres to its grounds. Olivet Memorial Park also has the opportunity to purchase 11 acres of additional land.

Conclusion

Assuming the demand for full-casket burials and cremations remain relatively constant, administrators from the above mentioned cemeteries assert they would be able to meet San Franciscan's burial needs for at least the next 20 years with their current grounds. According to Ms. Cathy Atkinson, General Manager of the Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery, the largest cemetery in Colma, Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery would be able to meet these needs for at least the next 200 years

with their existing space. In addition, as discussed above, several of the cemeteries will be able to expand their current grounds and may be able to use their existing space more efficiently, to accommodate additional demand. Furthermore, if the trend toward cremation continues, Colma would be able to provide additional space for San Franciscans. In conclusion, the future burial needs of San Franciscans will be sufficiently met by Colma well into the next century.



Harvey M. Rose

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